"Mrs Robinson Crusoe"

by

IDELLE S. MENG

ILLUSTRATED BY F. E. HILEY

A bride of only four months' standing, Mrs. Meng accompanied her husband to the loneliest islands in the Pacific—a little-known group of uninhabited *atolls* lying only a few feet above sea-level and a thousand miles from the nearest land. Here, with two men, three rabbits, and a dog "Friday," she lived for eleven long months, meeting with experiences that make most fascinating reading.

I.

LATE in the afternoon of October 21st, 1920, the last of our stores, with our canoe and small power-boat, were packed aboard the *Sanyo Maru*, a Japanese motor *sampan* or fishing-boat, which my husband had chartered to take us to our wee domain out in the Pacific.

Mr. Meng and I had been married only four months that very day. We felt that a romantic adventure was in store—a sort of renewal of our honeymoon — and gave little thought to the busy world we were leaving behind, with its comforts and conveniences. My husband had made up his mind to investigate the possibilities of copra production on some little-known islands, the Palmyra group, lying far to the south of Hawaii, and I had insisted on going with him.

The Authoress, Mrs. Idelle S. Meng.

About a hundred persons, either our friends or friends of the other members of our little expedition, were there to see us off. Some few business men who had shown a friendly interest in my husband's new venture were among the crowd. After many good wishes had been showered upon us, we scrambled aboard the crowded deck of the little sixty-five foot motor craft that was to be our home during the thousand-mile voyage.

The *personnel* of this venturesome expedition consisted of the skipper, whom we had engaged for the trip; Edwin Benner, a young Honoluluan, who was to be my husband's assistant in the copra industry after we had reached our destination; and Mr. Tullock, also a Honoluluan, who was only going down with us on a vacation and would return with the *Sanyo Maru* when she went back to Honolulu. My husband and I completed the list of white people, while there were in addition the five Japanese sailors, three rabbits, and "Friday," my wee brown pup. The rabbits had been given me by a friend at the last moment, while "Friday" I had purchased from an old Hawaiian woman an hour before I boarded the boat.

As soon as we cleared the harbour we tidied up the deck, put down our mattresses, changed into comfortable clothes, and were soon rolled in our blankets for the night.

The next morning found everybody sea-sick, except the skipper and the Japanese seamen, and so we remained for several days thereafter. As the *sampan* was built only for fishing, there was no cabin accommodation, so we moved our two double mattresses on to the top of the engine-house. With a tarpaulin tied closely over a ridge pole above our heads to protect us from the sun and rain, we lived, slept, and ate in that close cubby-hole for the rest of the voyage.

Save for a shower or two, the days and nights passed uneventfully until the morning of the sixth day. Then, early in the forenoon, we began to meet great flocks of

birds. Our spirits brightened considerably; we even had mental visions of sleeping ashore that night.

The skipper "shot the sun" at noon and reported that we were about in the correct latitude, but that we were at least seventy miles too far east; so we immediately altered our course due west. We had left Honolulu on Thursday evening and this was Wednesday noon of the following week. It had been estimated that we should probably reach our destination at the end of the seventh day or by noon on the eighth.

All that afternoon we strained our eyes toward the distant horizon, but no land appeared. Twilight faded and darkness settled down upon the little boat. Blacker than the night were our spirits. We were tired of our tiny abode on the engine-house, we were tired of our food—what little we had been able to eat—but most of all we were tired of hearing and seeing the ceaseless rolling waters around us.

Oh, for a bath! I had changed from a dress into khaki breeches and a blue shirt shortly after we left Honolulu, and had not had this apparel off since. The men were unshaven and looked like pirates.

A thousand miles is a long trip for a *sampan* to make; therefore a lot of motor-fuel was necessary. Our cargo took up so much deck space, however, that we carried as few drums of fuel as we thought we could manage with. Now after the skipper had measured the gasolene in the tanks and counted the extra drums on deck, he suggested to my husband that the motor should be stopped and the sails used instead. Mr. Meng agreed to this as there was a brisk, favourable wind, so the sails were set and we rolled up in our blankets for the night.

I was awake at intervals during the long dark night. There were dark heavy clouds over the moon, and not even a star showed its twinkle to cheer us along. Occasionally I would crawl out from under my tarpaulin, make my way to the bow, and sit with whoever happened to be on watch at the time. Great boobies—sea-birds similar to gulls—hovered over the boat, and two or three perched themselves upon the rigging and rested with their heads beneath their wings. One old bird added to the weirdness of the long night by a continual squawking.

At four o'clock my husband went to the bow to relieve Benner, who had been on watch for a couple of hours. I donned my sweater and joined him, as I found it impossible to sleep. We talked anxiously concerning our position. There we were, sailing along we knew not where. We had already logged more than enough miles to have reached the islands, but there was still no sign of land. My husband told me he hadn't a great deal of confidence in the skipper as a navigator, and that on the morrow he would get Benner to check up his figures.

Benner, though only a lad of nineteen, had been at sea for a year and a half in deep-sea craft. After he returned to his home in Honolulu, he had re-entered Punahau College as a senior. A short time before we left Honolulu he had read an account in the papers of my husband's plan to promote the production of copra on a group of islands south of Hawaii, and he persuaded his parents to permit him to give up school and accompany us on what promised to be an unusual adventure.

Benner had secured his papers as third mate on his last voyage, and had some splendid nautical instruments of his own; so we felt that his report on the position might be of assistance to the skipper. Therefore, at noon the next day, both of them took several "sights," and when they were worked out Benner reported that our destination lay at least a hundred miles behind, while the skipper's report showed that we were still headed toward the islands. This difference in the calculations was terribly disheartening to us, while some uneasiness was noticed among the Japanese.

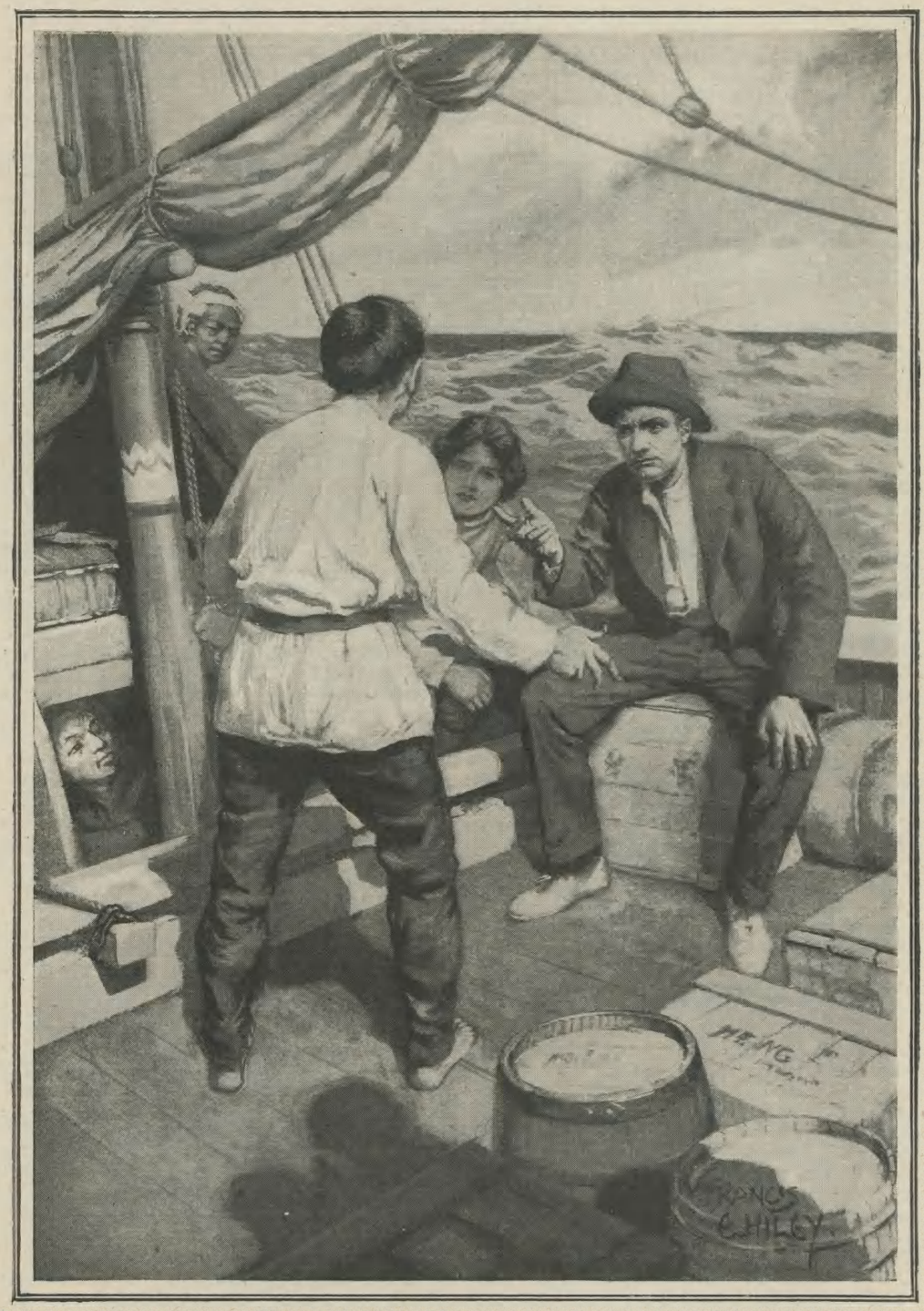
Mr. Meng was at a loss as to which position to accept as the correct one. However, since we could sail west at any time without consuming fuel, while to go east meant using our precious gasolene, it was decided to take Benner's report as the right one. Should we fail to locate the islands after logging the necessary number of miles in that direction, we could cut out our motor and sail west. So the sails came down, the engine was started, and we put about.

All that afternoon and through the long night we pushed on into the wind. About two o'clock the moon went into total eclipse, and this peculiar phenomenon only added to the weirdness of the night.

We white members of the party had been so sick that we had eaten very little food since leaving Honolulu, but the crew had more than made up for our lack of appetite. Next morning, however, their big pot of rice and their dishes of tea remained untouched. There was much talking and wild gesticulating among them. Finally, Tokio-yama, their spokesman, came to my husband. "Meester," he said, "men plenty scare. They no lak white captain. They say islands no stop here; by and by we lost. They want to go back Honolulu."

"Tell them," replied my husband, "that we came find islands; we no go back till we *do* find them. I got plenty good gun; I make sailors work."

When I heard that conversation I nearly stopped breathing. It was a mutiny, of course! They always have them in sea-yarns. However, nothing more was heard from the discouraged men. The log was hauled in at ten o'clock, and by checking it



"'Tell them,' replied my husband, 'I got plenty good gun; I make sailors work.'"

with the report made at noon the day before, we found that we had travelled far enough east along our line of latitude. So, for fear we might pass the islands, we "lay to" until noon, when our position could be verified by the sun. During the time we drifted there we saw a few large sharks. This was promising, as it is said that these sharks are only found near land. No birds were seen, but we later learned that they always fish on the leeward side of the islands so that they can find their way back by flying into the wind.

Meanwhile Benner had been going over the skipper's figures, and discovered that on the day we turned west the skipper had used a wrong table in his nautical book. I know nothing about navigation; but from the impression I got it was a mathematical error. This fact was proved when both the men took their noon observations and worked them out. This time their positions varied only a few miles.

It was past twelve when we headed north to where the islands were believed to be. I kept keenly on the look-out for signs of land, and was rewarded for the hour or more that I hung to the mast in the hot sun by being the first to make out a dim outline along the horizon. I yelled, and was joined by the skipper, who had also seen this hazy object in the distance. After we had all had a squint through the glasses we were fully convinced that there was no mistake—it was really land. Much rejoicing prevailed among the Japanese as well as ourselves.

All eyes were strained toward the grey smudge ahead, which gradually took on the outline of waving coco-palms. We were approaching Palmyra, and would presently drop anchor off her emerald crescent. How I thrilled at the thought of landing on this coconut-clad *atoll!* Soon it lay before my eyes, calm, peaceful, and beautiful.

Many interesting tales, both true and legendary, cluster round Palmyra, and as we drew nearer I began to go over in my mind the facts we had gleaned. Lying in 5 degrees 40 minutes and 4 seconds North Latitude, and 161 degrees 11 minutes and 20 seconds West Longitude, most accounts erroneously place the islands in the "South Seas," whose northern boundary is the Equator. Fifty-two palm-covered islets go to make up the group, all of them together amounting in area to about eight hundred acres. The two largest islands are fifty acres each, while some of the smaller ones are only a quarter of an acre in size. The group spreads east and west in the shape of an elongated horse-shoe, encircling five lagoons. These lagoons range from six to thirty fathoms in depth. Around the group and following its outline is a coral reef, not more than one-fifth of a mile outside the islets. The crescent, or horse-shoe, formation of reef and islets opens toward the west. From this side only can a small boat make an entrance into the lagoons; it is also the only side of the group where a large vessel can be anchored in safety. It was from this point that we entered the little world that was my home for eleven long months.

Great sea-birds hovered over our *sampan* as we cruised slowly around hunting for a safe anchorage. They alighted fearlessly on the masts and the deck-cargo; while tiny white love-birds expressed their curiosity by continually fluttering their wings almost in our faces.

With some difficulty the motor-boat was lowered over the side and we tumbled into it with a few blankets and enough food for the night. With the exception of Tokio-yama, the Japanese were to remain on the *sampan*, while the rest of us, accompanied by our little four-legged companion, "Friday," went ashore for the night. After the skipper had given some final orders to the crew our little craft started on the mile-and-a-half trip to the islets.

In the clear crystal depths could be seen wonderful growths of coral which kept me in ecstasy. I have never seen such wonderfully-coloured fish, and such queer ones, as those that darted beneath our small boat; nor were sharks absent, their long, sinister-looking bodies darting here and there.

As we drew near to the islands we observed great clusters of white objects in the over-hanging branches of the trees by the water's edge. We commented upon this discovery and were at a loss to know what they were.

"Oh, the beautiful morning-glories!" said the skipper. "I have heard of large ones, but I never dreamed they were as large as that."

When we drew nearer, however, we found that "the beautiful morning-glories" were huge sea-birds on their nests in the branches.

After grounding several times on the top of coral-heads and shoals, we at last reached the outermost *atoll*, known as Home Islet. It was here that the only sign of habitation in the group existed. This was the shack built there by the owner of the islands, Judge Cooper, of Honolulu. My husband and his associates having taken a lease of the property, the judge had kindly given his permission for us to use this hut.

We tied our boat up and walked to the front of the lonely-looking, weather-beaten house. Silence prevailed except for the cries of the disturbed sea-birds. The rusty door-knob fell to the ground at a touch, and the swollen door refused to open.

The house consisted of only one room about twenty-two feet wide and twenty-four feet long. The roof was of corrugated iron, while unplaned boards formed the walls. The side walls were only four feet in height;

the space from the top of the wall to the roof was open, the broad, low-hanging eaves protecting the interior from the weather.

Benner climbed through this opening and forced the door, which promptly dropped from its rusted hinges.

We armed ourselves with some rusty cane knives found in the shack and then—carrying our flash lights, for it was now quite dark—waded into the shallow water to kill fish for our supper. Great schools of mullet were feeding along the shoals, and leapt out of the water at our lights as we

"Robinson Crusoe's" hut on Palmyra Island.

Odds and ends of camp equipment—tents, fish-nets, poles, axes, and so on—littered the floor. Several huge coconut crabs hid themselves behind objects and made a queer tapping noise by knocking their pinchers against the floor or the wall.

After exclaiming over each and everything in the house we proceeded to explore the island. We found it almost round, and covering an area of about three acres. Numbers of hermit crabs were everywhere. I had never seen any kind of crab that inhabits a shell before, so was much interested in examining them. It seems impossible that Nature has not given them a shell of their own; but so it is, and they hunt up the discarded shells of a certain sea-slug and appropriate them for their own.

In walking about the islands these queer, creepy things kept me frightened to death, as I constantly had to step over them and sometimes right on them. At my approach they would draw themselves into their rough shell houses, clench their pinchers across the opening, and roll over backwards. They would remain like this until everything became quiet; then they would cautiously come out and creep away with their cumbersome house trailing behind.

approached. It was a simple trick to throw our knives at them, and in a short time we had enough for our meal.

We found boiled, saltless mullet to be very poor food, but we broiled a huge coconut crab as well, and with pork, beans, and tea soon appeased our appetites. The coconut crab excels any crab or lobster I have ever eaten. It feeds entirely on the rich white meat of the coconut, which it gathers by climbing to the top of the trees, sawing or pinching the stem of the nut and letting it fall to the ground. Then Mister Crab crawls down and proceeds to bore a hole in the nut and extract the meat, using the first leg behind each pincher.

My first night in that shack was one long nightmare. The men spread their blankets on the dusty floor, while my bed was a large wicker chair. No human beings had been on the islands for three years, so the floor and furniture were covered with leaves and dirt. Nets, tools, and tents were the hiding places of hundreds of small grey crickets, which kept me miserable during the night by crawling over my face and neck, while the dying camp-fire kept the birds in a great state of excitement. Their weird squawkings, added to the noise that the hermit crabs

made knocking their shells against the house or against each other, made sleep impossible for me.

A box of hard ships' biscuits had been left on the floor, and a huge coconut crab stole one of them, taking it behind the door. We were scared out of our wits by the battering and banging of the cracker upon the floor as the crab made a noisy meal of it. Several times during the night I called my husband to my side to ascertain the source of some new sound.

The next morning the unloading of our supplies was started, but it was the third day before this job was completed. We knew nothing about the rise and fall of the tides and, by sad experience, found that unloading could only be accomplished at high tide. The first trip the motor-boat made out to the *sampan* it returned all right, but the second load was only half-way back when the little craft grounded on a shoal.

Mr. Tullock and Tokioyama happened to be the unfortunates in the boat. They dared not try to wade to shore as the water teemed with sharks; so there they stayed in the hot sun, without food or water until the tide began to come in again. This proved to be a valuable lesson; after that trips were only made during the first part of the high tide.

Meanwhile the Japanese aboard the *sampan* soon filled the ice-holds with fish, to be sold in the Honolulu markets. Quantities of coconuts were also loaded aboard the vessel, and on the morning of the fourth day the *Sanyo* was ready for her return trip to Honolulu.

We took the skipper, Mr. Tullock, and Tokioyama out to the waiting *sampan* in our motor-boat and bade them farewell. Then the anchor was lifted and they departed, leaving two men, a woman, three rabbits, and a brown pup alone on the most isolated island in the Pacific Ocean.

Strange to say we felt no misgivings while

we watched the *Sanyo* pass out of sight. There was so much to be done toward getting our habitation fixed up, our stores put away, a partition erected in the little house, and a garden planted. After all this was completed explorations were to be made and then the real work of gathering cocoanuts and drying copra was to start.

We worked from daylight to dark, and in a few days were quite comfortably

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fixed. We made a clearing behind the house and planted a garden there. To keep the crabs out we put up two-foot posts all round the plot, and to these we nailed old corrugated iron roofing, placing it well into the ground so that they could not burrow beneath it.

This roofing, by the way, had an interesting history. Japanese bird-poachers had at one time lived on Christmas Island, a French possession located some two thousand miles to the south. When they left Christmas Island to come to Palmyra they stole this roofing from the shack of the Catholic priest who owned the island and brought it to use in building their new abode on Palmyra.

Here they caught and skinned the beautiful birds, and some sort of trading schooner brought them supplies and took away their feathers and skins. These feathers were shipped to Japan, where they were properly cured and dressed and went to America to adorn ladies' hats.

Many of the South Sea Islands were inhabited by poachers at one time, so Britain, France, and the United States sent war-vessels down and drove them from their respective territories.

When Judge Cooper bought these islands in 1911, he found the corrugated iron shack surrounded by twenty huge Oriental stone jars used by the Japanese for catching rain water. We found the jars invaluable for the same purpose. Palmyra is only five feet above sea-level, so our water supply must be caught when it rains; there are no freshwater springs. There seems to be no danger of anyone going thirsty as it rains abundantly; and as Palmyra has no mosquitoes our water was always pure and wholesome.

Although quite near the Equator the climate is delightful. Lying in the path of the south-east trades, and with no hills to keep the breeze off, it is always wonderfully cool. During the eleven months that I spent there we kept a complete record of the weather, and a glance at the condensed report shows what a perfect climate the islands possess.

How well I recall our first trip around the crescent of islets! Low tide occurred early in the morning, so we made an early start. Clad in knee-breeches, blue shirts, heavy shoes, woollen socks, and our straw hats, we started north across the shoals at the western end of the lagoons. We each carried a big cane-knife to discourage the sharks. We struck the outermost islet of the northern wing of the crescent and tramped toward the east.

Between the islets are channels leading from the sea into the lagoons. Some of these are only ankle deep while others are waist deep. We picked our way carefully in crossing these channels to avoid falling over the rough coral rocks. In stepping from one large coral-head to another we often saw the huge, ugly bodies of black conger eels coiled down between the two rocks. Ugh! They made my blood run cold! We skirted along the beaches of some of the islets, and went directly through the interior of others. Most of them were densely covered with coconut palms, birds'-nest ferns, and another large-leaved fern that is commonly seen in Honolulu. The birds'-nest fern grows on the trees as well as on the ground. Even on the very tall coconut trees it is often found near the top where it is shaded from the sun.

The foliage of the coconut palm is especially luxuriant on Palmyra. The leaves are long and very broad and entirely intact, as there are no insects to feed on them as is the case in and around Honolulu. The variety of coconut that grows on Palmyra is of enormous size. Specimens of these nuts have been sent to Prof. Beccari, of Italy, a famous botanist, who reports them to contain the thickest meat of any variety of coconut in the world. There are possibly two hundred thousand bearing trees on the islands; also a like number that are either too old or too crowded to bear. Beneath the bearing trees the nuts are stacked two to four deep. Some of these nuts are newly-fallen ones, while others have already germinated. Those nearest the ground have taken root and have shoots two or three feet high. The nuts on the young trees in their first bearing hung so low that we could reach them from the ground. We stopped on several islands to quench our thirst by drinking the water from the nuts after we had chopped one end off with our knives.

In crossing the shoals and channels we were kept in a constant state of excitement by small four-foot baby sharks which rushed toward us, attracted by the sound of the splashing water, as we waded along. The instant they heard the noise they would make a dash for us, leaving a wake behind them like a torpedo boat. Upon these occasions we would wield our wicked knives, dance a sort of impromptu war-dance, and let forth blood-curdling yells, and the poor sharks, in most cases, left us alone. When we sighted the black triangle that represented Mr. Shark's dorsal fin before he sighted us, we would either stand perfectly still until he passed us by or would look around for the nearest shoal and make a mad dash for it. Once on a shoal we felt safe, as Mr. Shark could not come into such shallow water. When a baby shark happened to get between Mr. Meng's feet on one occasion, Benner and I enjoyed the show very much from our respective shoals. Mr. Meng is tall and usually of dignified appearance, but when this vicious-looking infant took him unawares, his wild and rapid manipulations of his long arms and legs were anything but dignified. Our merriment was of short duration, however, for the shark suddenly turned in his mad charge and headed in our direction; and then my husband rushed to a place of safety and enjoyed *our* exhibition.

The tide comes in so rapidly when it starts that it is really not wise to take too long a "hike," so we had to cut back across the crescent, going between the beautiful lagoons and thence west to the home island.

The collecting of coconuts was started on one of the largest islets of the group, Cooper Island, lying about one and a half miles from Home Island. When low tide occurred in the morning the boys would take their lunch, walk over, and then return at the evening low tide. The tides are an hour later each day, and when tide occurred in the morning they would paddle over in our little green canvas canoe.

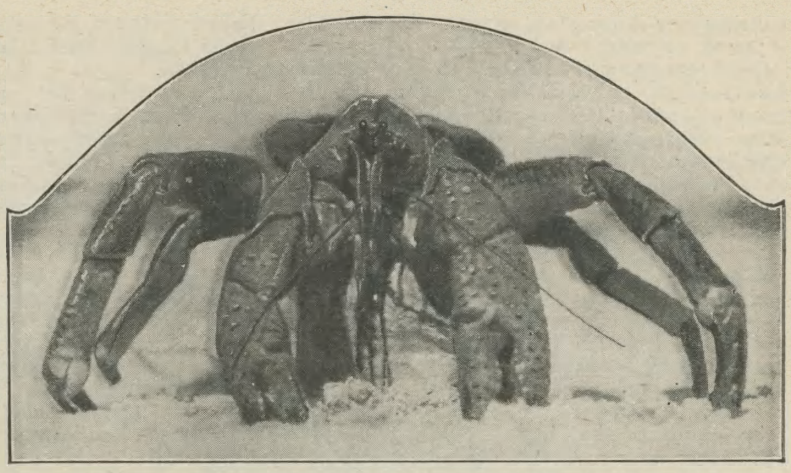
The first work they did on Cooper was to build the copra shed. The posts of this were the trunks of coconut trees cut into eight-foot lengths and sunk about eighteen inches into the ground. The roof was a double canvas affair, built of old sails we had purchased from a ship-chandler before leaving Honolulu. The frame-work was of the long slender pandanus palm, the back and side walls of the shed being made of coconut leaves several layers thick. The front wall was a loose canvas, easily put up or taken down when desired. Rough boards formed a platform about three feet from the ground on the inside of the shed. This was used for laying the meat of the coconut on for drying. "Smudges" were built beneath this platform, under a hood of corrugated iron to keep the boards from catching fire.

It was the beginning of the rainy season when we started the work on Palmyra, so it was necessary to dry the nuts by "smudge." Later, however, when the rains were less frequent, we began drying in the sun; this proved a quicker and less troublesome method.

The nuts were collected in piles on the islets and when the tide rose the canoe was towed along the water's edge and filled,

then transferred to the island on which the shed was located. The weather was closely watched and when conditions were favourable the nuts were split and spread on the ground to dry.

One blow from an axe was sufficient to lay the nut in half. Any water left inside was poured out; or, if the nut had germinated, the growth was removed before it was placed on the ground to dry. Pieces of canvas were kept handy to place over the nuts in case of a rain-shower. Fresh water causes the nuts to spoil, but salt water seems to have no effect on the meat. The nearer to salt water coconut palms grow the better. I have been told that coconuts are rarely ever found more than seventy feet above sea-level, and since Palmyra is so low it is especially adapted to their growth.



One of the "coconut crabs" that inhabited the island in countless numbers.

The third day of sun is sufficient to cause the meat of the coconut to shrivel and crack away from the husk. Then it is easily gouged out, placed on canvas, given another day in the sun, and then stored in the shed. It is now thoroughly dry and there will be no danger of mildew.

We soon found that it was necessary to watch the shed at night as the coconut crabs would get into the copra and take great quantities away. These crabs are huge monsters of a muddy red and murky purple colour, there being two species. They are often twenty inches across the back and weigh eight or ten pounds. They live in the birds'-nest fern, or in hollow logs of the giant heliotrope trees. Outside of their abode may be found a great pile of coconut husks in fine shreds which they have stripped from the nut in order to make a meal of it. Their pace is a funny one. I have often thought they resembled a slowly moving camel, swaying along with rocky movement. They move forward awkwardly when unmolested, but as soon as one annoys them they go into "reverse" and beat a hasty retreat backwards. In spite of their uncanny appearance they are one of the most toothsome delicacies I have ever eaten. Strange to say we did not tire of coconut crab as we did of fish, while we rarely went to the trouble of catching lobsters, although they were quite plentiful along the reef.

The lagoons and channels literally teemed with fish. Most of the varieties are edible, though if one were to take a notion to eat any of the vari-coloured species I am sure he would feel that he was eating the rainbow and would suffer from "painter's colic."

The huge "balloon fish" were most interesting. Upon being disturbed they would immediately inflate themselves to twice their normal size and roll around helplessly. Mullet, which sells at an enormous price in Honolulu, is probably the most plentiful of any variety found at Palmyra. They feed along the shoals and inlets and will go leaping like goats into the air when disturbed. Their leaps and bounds do not vary more than a few inches in distance and they are actually in uniform line. We often killed them by throwing our knives at them.

It was hard to determine which was the most interesting, the bird life or the marine life of Palmyra. After an exploring trip around the edge of the beautiful clear lagoons where, with my water-glass, I would gaze into the crystal depths at the myriads of interesting fish, I would decide that *there* was Palmyra's greatest charm. Then, after a stroll along the shell-strewn beach, from which all the feathered inhabitants of the islands could be observed, I would decide that such unusual bird-life existed nowhere else in the world. They were so unused to humans that they had no fear of us whatever; we could walk up to them and touch them as they sat on their nests. We took great pride in our wonderful aviary and never in any way harmed or molested them.

From the giant French frigate-bird to the tiny white love-bird they were all so new and interesting that I never tired of them

during my long stay among them. The frigate, or man-o'-war bird, as he is often called, is a lazy old fellow. He will not fish for himself, but will lie in watch for the boobies, and pounce upon them when they return with a fish-laden pouch. Sometimes these frigates can be seen, a mere speck in the blue sky, soaring like an aeroplane among the clouds. Suddenly they will make a straight downward "nose dive" upon some unsuspecting booby, and relieve him of his food. The booby feeds entirely upon flying fish, which it catches from thirty to forty miles at sea. He carries it in his big pouch in front of his stomach. When he gets hungry, or when he wishes to feed his young, the fish is forced up into his mouth. He then swallows it or else thrusts it down the gullet of the baby booby, whichever the case may call for. When the frigate attacks Mr. Booby he tries manfully to fight back, but the fight is such an unevenly matched one that he soon gives up by disgorging his food. This the frigate usually catches in mid-air. Sometimes there is a little competition, as perhaps, before the frigate can fly beneath the booby and catch the fish, a second frigate, or even a second booby, will swoop in and go off with the spoils.

So many people have doubted the story that love-birds balance their eggs on a single branch of a tree that I hesitate to make the statement, but it is nevertheless a fact. Often the limb is no thicker than one's two fingers; and yet the egg is laid there and the mother bird sits on it until it hatches! The little bird then occupies the limb until he is able to fly out to sea and fish for himself. These birds are very pretty, with black beady eyes outlined by white feathers. They are small, and fly with a great deal of wing-flapping. Not only their eyes but their beak and feet are black, so that the contrast with their plumage is very striking. I had often seen these little creatures on ladies' winter bonnets, but never knew what kind of birds they were till I went to Palmyra.

The curlew is the only edible bird on the islands, and we often trapped them for table use. In the early morning or evening their long, plaintive cry was heard as they called to their mates from one islet to another. Two species of tern are found. One species is a sooty colour, with a white spot on his head, and nests in the trees; the other, which nests on the ground, is black with a white under-body. The latter we refer to as the "evening dress" tern, as his white markings were similar to the white shirt-front of a gentlemen's evening apparel. This "evening dress" fellow furnished us with the only eggs we had while on the islands. They lay by the thousands, in colonies, on the white sand. In gathering the eggs we broke only one or two, and if they were fresh, all the rest in that section would be the same. However, the laying season was only of six weeks' duration, and after that time we had no more fresh eggs until six months later, when they would lay again. When the eggs hatched the ground would be so covered with tiny fluff-balls that one had to be careful in walking around them to avoid stepping on them.

One of the most valuable island foods was the coco-cabbage, or heart of the coco palm. It is that part of the tree that is found where the leaves join on to the body, and is obtained by cutting down the tree, splitting the head of it, and taking this white tender heart out. Since the trees are entirely too thick for proper bearing on the islands, we did not mind cutting some of them down for food. When this heart is boiled it is similar to cabbage or asparagus, and when fried tastes like mushrooms or egg plant. This was the only green food we had. The garden we planted never flourished, as the soil had too much lime in it and was too near the salt water.

(*To be concluded.*)